

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

The President's News Conference With President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea

November 19, 2009

President Lee. We have beautiful weather today. I know that yesterday we had subzero cold. And President Obama brought with him very nice weather. On behalf of the people of the Republic of Korea, I wish to extend our warmest welcome and greetings to President Obama and his delegation.

We know how much President Obama appreciates and understands the value of Korean and Asian cultures. I believe that President Obama's global leadership, a leadership that is based on mutual respect and mutual goals, will help usher in an era of hope and renewal to the United States and better serve peace and prosperity throughout the world.

Having held three summit meetings with him and having met many times in various multilateral settings over the past 10 months, I think I can say that we have indeed become very close friends. In particular, I think our discussions today have been particularly in-depth and very fruitful, very honest talks. The relationship between our two countries is excellent and stands stronger than ever. President Obama and I believe that it can become even stronger. So we will continue to consult on specific ways to move our relationship forward.

President Obama and I reaffirmed the solid ROK-U.S. defense posture, including the extended deterrence. We also agreed to further develop our partnership so that it can become an example of what a strategic alliance of the 21st century should be by faithfully implementing the joint vision for the alliance adopted at our last meeting in June.

As part of these efforts, we agreed to have our foreign and defense ministers to meet and discuss specific ways to develop our alliance to the future sometime next year, which marks the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean war.

President Obama and I expressed our shared satisfaction that Korea and the United States are working closely together with regards to our approach vis-a-vis North Korea and the nuclear issue. We also reaffirmed our commitment to the complete and verifiable denuclearization of North Korea through the six-party talks. We fully share the view that the North Korean nuclear issue requires a definite and comprehensive resolution, as I described in our grand bargain, and agreed to closely consult on how to elaborate and implement this approach.

It is my hope that North Korea would accept our proposal so that we can usher in a new era in which North Korea can be assured of its security and its people can enjoy real improvements in their quality of life. We agreed to work closely together with the other countries in the six-party process to bring North Korea back to the six-party talks at an early date, and make sure that North Korea takes substantive measures towards its denuclearization. Moreover, we noted our shared concern for North Korean humanitarian issues and agreed to work together to bring improvements in this area.

Meanwhile, President Obama and I reaffirmed the economic and strategic importance of the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement. We agreed to redouble our efforts to move the agreement forward.

Noting with satisfaction the achievements of the G-20 summit meeting in Pittsburgh, President Obama and I agreed to continue cooperating on implementing a framework for ensuring a strong, sustainable, and balanced growth. We also agreed to work together to ensure the success of next November's G-20 summit to be held here in Korea.

At the same time, we share the view that such global challenges as climate change, green growth, nonproliferation, and counterterrorism requires a collective response. In particular, I would like to commend President Obama's endeavor towards a world without nuclear weapons, and in this respect, the Republic of Korea intends to participate in and do its part to ensure the success of next April's nuclear security summit in Washington, DC.

I am very pleased that we were able to have candid discussions on important issues that confront us, and I'm happy that we produced fruitful outcomes. I also wish to once again congratulate President Obama on his very successful trip to Asia. And let me once again join the Korean people in expressing to President Obama and his delegation our warmest sentiments of friendship.

Thank you.

President Obama. Well, it's a great honor to be making my first trip to the Republic of Korea as President of the United States. I want to thank my good friend President Lee and the Korean people for their extraordinary hospitality. And I have to say that the arrival ceremony for our state visit was as spectacular as any that we've seen.

I was privileged to host President Lee in Washington in June. As he mentioned, we've seen each other at many multilateral forums as well, and we've developed a strong working relationship and friendship. And it's a great pleasure to visit this beautiful city.

The Republic of Korea is a close and valued friend and ally of the United States. The strong bonds between our people were forged in the battles of the Korean war nearly 60 years ago. Our alliance, which is grounded in shared interests and values, has provided peace and security on this peninsula and in the region for many decades. And I'm pleased to say that our alliance has never been stronger than it is today.

The 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean war presents an important opportunity to honor the service of our veterans, to reflect on the principles for which they fought, and to move forward in adapting our alliance to meet the challenges of the 21st century. As part of this process, we agreed that Secretaries Clinton and Gates will meet with their Korean counterparts next year to work on realizing our shared vision for the alliance going forward.

The Republic of Korea has made extraordinary progress in the six decades since the Korean war. Evidence of that progress can be seen in Korea's strong democracy, its vibrant economy, but it can also be seen in Korea's increasingly prominent role in global affairs. Indeed, in just one generation, the Republic of Korea has gone from a recipient of aid to a donor nation and, under the leadership of President Lee, a leader within the G-20.

The United States has been proud to stand as a friend and ally of the Korean people throughout this period. Later today, I'll also visit some of our service men and women, who represent America's unwavering commitment to the security of this country.

In going forward, I know that our two nations can strengthen our cooperation on a range of critical issues, including several that we discussed today.

On North Korea, our Governments have maintained extraordinarily close cooperation, and President Lee and I are in full agreement on our common approach going forward. I reaffirmed my commitment to continue working together in the six-party process to achieve a definitive and comprehensive resolution of the nuclear issue. As a part of that effort, we will be sending Ambassador Bosworth to North Korea on December 8th to engage in direct talks with the North Koreans.

Our message is clear: If North Korea is prepared to take concrete and irreversible steps to fulfill its obligations and eliminate its nuclear weapons program, the United States will support economic assistance and help promote its full integration into the community of nations. That opportunity and respect will not come with threats. North Korea must live up to its obligations.

The Republic of Korea is also, obviously, a close trading partner of the United States, and the relationship between our nations advance our common prosperity. To strengthen those ties, President Lee and I discussed the U.S.-Korea free trade agreement, which holds out the promise of serving our mutual interests. And together, we're committed to working together to move the agreement forward.

I also thanked President Lee for his leadership at the G-20, as we continue our efforts to transition from rescuing the global economy to promoting balanced and sustainable growth. In that effort, Korea will play a critical role as a host for the G-20 next year.

We also discussed the importance of promoting security and stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and I welcomed President Lee's decision to establish a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. This important contribution will help support the strengthening of Afghan capacity, which is essential to achieving our goals in Afghanistan.

And finally, we agreed to coordinate our efforts to clean energy and climate change. I told President Lee that Korea's recent announcement of an ambitious target for 2020 is a model for emerging economies. And building on the progress that we made at APEC and in Beijing, I will continue to work closely with President Lee to help pave the way for a successful outcome in Copenhagen next month.

Once again, I want to thank President Lee and the Korean people for their warm hospitality. I look forward to working with you, Mr. President, to strengthen a relationship that does so much to advance the mutual interests of our citizens. And as a fan of Korean culture and Korean barbecue, I'm also very much looking forward to lunch—[laughter]—that we'll be having in a few minutes. So thank you very much. *Kamsahamnida*. All right.

North Korea/South Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Q. First of all, Mr. President—yes, KBS, Mr. Lee—[inaudible]—from KBS. First of all, welcome to Korea, Mr. President. A question going out to President Lee regarding North Korean nuclear issue: Do you envisage any timeline between Korea and the United States in order to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue? Do you have any deadlines about it? And also, regarding the grand bargain proposal that you proposed to North Korea, how do you think that the North Koreans will react to your grand bargain proposal?

And you—both of you mentioned during—the result of your talks, but what kind of things did you discuss regarding the KORUS FTA?

A question going out to President Obama on the KORUS FTA: The KORUS FTA is regarded here within Korea as something that will further strengthen bilateral relationship between Korea and the United States, and many Korean people are hopeful, or hoping for the

early ratification of the KORUS FTA. And I would just like to ask, Mr. President, of your strategic vision regarding the KORUS FTA. And as for the grand bargain proposal, I would just like to ask you, how much do you intend to cooperate with the South Koreans in implementing this?

President Lee. I think we promised to ask one question to one leader, but I think you're asking many questions all at once. First of all, on North Korea nuclear issue and convincing North Korea to give up their nuclear weapons program, it is not a simple matter. We know that for sure. For the last 20 years or so, we've been dealing with the North Koreans and negotiating with the North Koreans. We would take one step forward and two steps back, and that has taken 20 years, and still we do not have a full resolution of this issue.

Now with President Obama in the White House, we were successful in passing and adopting a U.N. Security Council resolution. International cooperation is perfect, in my opinion, in terms of trying to resolve this issue peacefully, and I think we are entering into a new chapter in bringing this issue to an end.

I do not put any deadline to resolving this North Korean nuclear issue. Of course we would want to resolve this issue as soon as possible because that is critical for ensuring peace and stability of the region and the world. And so this is why I proposed a grand bargain proposal.

And what's important is to really know whether North Korea has genuine intent to give up fully and verifiably their nuclear weapons program. And we must find out the intention of the North Koreans, and as soon as we find out, the better it is. And the negotiations to convince North Korea to resolve their nuclear weapons issue, like I said, it is not going to be easy, but I believe it is possible that we can resolve this issue peacefully. So together with President Obama and the international community, we will work to resolve this issue.

About the grand bargain, the North Koreans haven't yet conveyed what they thought of the grand bargain, but in order for the North Koreans to ensure their stability, to improve the lives of the North Korean population, to have economic prosperity, in short, for a better future for the North Koreans, it is my wish that the North Koreans will adopt the grand bargain proposal.

And as for the KORUS FTA, I'm sure President Obama will be making a comment, so I'll just listen.

President Obama. Well, first of all, with respect to North Korea, there's going to be extraordinarily close coordination between our two countries, as there has been for many years.

The thing I want to emphasize is that President Lee and I both agree on the need to break the pattern that has existed in the past in which North Korea behaves in a provocative fashion; it then is willing to return to talks; it talks for a while and then leaves the talks seeking further concessions, and there's never actually any progress on the core issues.

I think President Lee is exactly right, and my administration is taking the same approach, which is, the door is open to resolving these issues peacefully, for North Korea to see over time the reduction of sanctions and its increasing integration into the international community, something that will be good for its people, but it will only happen if North Korea is taking serious steps around the nuclear issue. And we will not be distracted by a whole host of other side items that end up generating a lot of meetings but not concrete action.

Now, with respect to the free trade agreement, I am a strong believer that both countries can benefit from expanding our trade ties. And so I have told President Lee and his team that I am committed to seeing the two countries work together to move this agreement forward. There are still issues that are being discussed and worked on, and we have put our teams in place to make sure that we are covering all the issues that might be a barrier to final ratification of the agreement.

With respect to the United States, I think it's important to understand—and I shared this with President Lee—that American companies and workers are very confident in our ability to compete, and we recognize that there's not only a economic but also a strategic interest in expanding our ties to South Korea. There is, obviously, also a concern within the United States around the incredible trade imbalances that have grown over the last several decades. Those imbalances are not as prominent with Korea, but there has been a tendency, I think, to lump all of Asia together when Congress looks at trade agreements and says, it appears as if this is a one-way street.

And one of my goals is to make sure that as we work through these issues, that the American people, American businesses, American workers recognize that we have to look at each agreement and each country on its own merits, and make sure that we can create the kind of win-win situation that I know President Lee is interested in seeing as well. Okay?

I think that we've got a question. Julianna [Julianna Goldman, Bloomberg News].

Q. Thank you, Mr. President and President Lee.

President Obama. Oops, I'm sorry.

Iran/South Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, President Lee. President Obama, it appears that Iran has rejected the international offer on its nuclear problem. What are the severe consequences that you've threatened, and when will we see them?

And for President Lee, are you willing to open up your market to U.S. automobiles to get the Korean free trade agreement moving again?

President Obama. With respect to Iran, at the beginning of my administration, we put in place a policy that we have executed as drawn up over the last several months. What we said was that we would take a new approach and say to Iran that we are willing to engage them directly; that we would organize the international community around a series of proposals that would permit Iran to show its intentions to give up any nuclear weapon programs and pursue peaceful nuclear energy under the framework of a nonproliferation regime; that even as we were organizing the international community to put forward a fair deal to the Iranians, that we would also move on a dual track; and that we weren't going to duplicate what has happened with North Korea, in which talks just continue forever without any actual resolution to the issue, so that we indicated that our offer would be on the table for a certain period of time, and that when that time ran out, we would look at other approaches that would increase pressure on Iran to give up its nuclear weapons program.

Since that time, through the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as the P-5-plus-1, we put forward such a proposal, one in which low-enriched uranium could be removed from Iran, processed outside of Iran, returned to them in a way that couldn't be weaponized and used for research purposes.

The fairness of the deal, I think, is confirmed by the fact that Russia, China, the other members of the P-5-plus-1, as well as Mohamed ElBaradei, the Secretary General of the IAEA, all confirmed that this was a smart, creative proposal that could lead to a path in which Iran was no longer in breach of its international agreements, and that Iran should accept them.

Iran has taken weeks now and has not shown its willingness to say yes to this proposal. And I have not seen the report that you're referring to today, but we've seen indications that, whether it's for internal political reasons or because they are stuck in some of their own rhetoric, they have been unable to get to yes.

And so as a consequence, we have begun discussions with our international partners about the importance of having consequences, that the dual-track approach requires Iran to get a clear message that when it fails to take advantage of these opportunities, that in fact it is not making itself more secure, it's making itself less secure. And our expectation is, is that over the next several weeks, we will be developing a package of potential steps that we could take that will indicate our seriousness to Iran.

I continue to hold out the prospect that they may decide to walk through this door. I hope they do. But what I'm pleased about is the extraordinary international unity that we've seen. If you think at the beginning of the year how disjointed international efforts were and how uneven perceptions were about Iran's nuclear program and where we are today, I think it's an indication that we've taken the right approach.

President Lee. With regards to automobile, in principle, I believe in free trade, and I believe that the international community must strengthen free trade. For the last two decades or so, I think free trade and the movement of goods and services was the driving force behind the development and economic prosperity that we enjoy today.

But at the same time, I also believe that the global economy should grow in a more sustained and balanced way as well. If there are any imbalances between two economies, it should be corrected. And this is a topic and an agenda that is being discussed within the G-20 forum, and this is something that President Obama and I talked about as well.

For me, Korea and the United States, the facts are clear: Trade imbalances between our two countries is not great. I think it is safe to say that we have almost a balanced account between Korea and the United States. Of course when Korea was a closed economy with protectionist measures, there were some trade imbalances. But compared to countries like China and Japan, the trade imbalances between our two countries is very miniscule.

And President Obama, as he mentioned in his brief remarks just now, he said that all different economies should be judged on their own merits, and free trade agreements is not an exception. And he and I had very candid and frank discussions and forward-looking discussions between us today during the meeting on the—how to move the KORUS FTA forward. And I very much appreciate President Obama for engaging in such discussions.

In the United States, I think, there is a misperception that KORUS FTA, once it is passed, that it is somehow going to only benefit Korea and be detrimental to American consumers, which is not true. Of course there are economic perspectives to take into consideration, but there are also a much bigger strategic perspective to this. And I believe overall this is beneficial for both Korea and the United States.

Of course each industry will be impacted differently. Here in Korea, the service sector, the agricultural sector, they are completely against the passage of the KORUS FTA because

they lag far behind their American counterparts. But for us, the Korean Government, we view the KORUS FTA in a more comprehensive manner. Overall, it is beneficial for us in the long term.

If there is any problems in the automobile sector, like you asked, then we are ready to resolve this issue. There are other automobile manufacturers, like in the Europeans. I mean that, as we all know, they produce a tremendous number of automobiles, and we have a free trade agreement with the 27-member European Union, and we have an agreement which has been signed. And we are engaging more and more with our European partners.

And so I think we should have more opportunities to talk about these issues with each other. And on this issue, President Obama and I talked about, in detail, again, how to move forward this agreement. I believe that, again, this is beneficial for both Korea and the United States.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:35 p.m. at Blue House. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Yu Myung-hwan and Minister of National Defense Kim Tae-young of South Korea; and Ambassador Stephen W. Bosworth, Special Representative for North Korea Policy. President Lee and a reporter spoke in Korean, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 25.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: South Korea, President Lee.

Locations: Seoul, South Korea.

Names: Bosworth, Stephen W.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; ElBaradei, Mohamed; Gates, Robert M.; Kim Tae-young; Lee Myung-bak; Yu Myung-hwan.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Provincial Reconstruction Teams; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Deployment; Asia : Trade with U.S.; Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC); Atomic Energy Agency, International (IAEA); Business and industry : Global competitiveness; China : President Obama's visit; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Stabilization efforts; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Unrest; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Commerce, international : U.S. trade imbalances; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Developing countries, energy sources; Environment : Climate change; Iran : Diplomatic relations with U.S.; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iran : U.N. security council sanctions; North Korea : Ballistic missiles, testing; North Korea : International and U.S. sanctions; North Korea : Nuclear weapons development; North Korea : Six-party talks; North Korea : U.S. diplomatic efforts; North Korea : U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy; South Korea : Afghanistan, South Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team, deployment; South Korea : Defense relationship with U.S.; South Korea : Energy cooperation with U.S.; South Korea : Energy, alternative and renewable sources and technologies; South Korea : Free trade agreement with U.S.; South Korea : Korean war, 60th anniversary; South Korea : Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade; South Korea : Minister of National Defense; South Korea : President; South Korea : President Obama's visit; South Korea : Relations with U.S.; South Korea : Trade with U.S.; State, Department of : Secretary; United Nations : Framework Convention on Climate Change.

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